

isn't helpful, and may possibly lead to workers getting disciplined. The important thing is to act in a way that helps empower pickets and makes them feel stronger, and that means that the pickets need to feel they have a say in what supporters are doing.

Of course, not everyone on the picket line thinks the same, you might get told off by the branch secretary for doing something that most of the pickets are very happy with, so talk to more than one person.

Don't do "drive by politics." The time after a strike can be very difficult for workers. There may be victimisation or speedup. Stand by people and maintain long term contact if you can. It's also important that you and everyone else understand that you're there because you want to help the strike.

› **ENCOURAGE  
MASS  
DECISION  
MAKING**

› **KEEP  
UP YOUR  
SUPPORT  
AFTER THE  
STRIKE'S  
DONE**

## THE MORNING AFTER...

**Strikes are emotionally intense. You will probably be tired, euphoric, angry, depressed or all four but the first day back at work is very important.**

Try to remember to think long term: it's not all about one strike, it's about what happens over a few years. Talk to people, check if anyone is being bullied, find out what went well or badly, think about how to approach people who crossed the picket line.

It's a good idea if you can organise a social event to get the strikers together to maintain togetherness.

**AND NOW, START BUILDING FOR THE NEXT ONE.**

# STRIKE

## A GUIDE TO WALKING OUT

Public sector strike, 2011



## INTRODUCTION

*A rise in strikes due to austerity after a long low period means that many people are going on strike for the first time, in workplaces where perhaps there hasn't been a strike since the nineties. North London Solidarity Federation is writing a pamphlet to get the strike experience of different workers down on paper, so that other workers can see what they've tried and what experiences they've had. This is just a small section of the pamphlet, which we are producing separately as there are several large unions balloting at the moment.*



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# SUPPORTERS

**People coming to visit the picket line to show solidarity can really raise people's spirits.**

One of the best ways to get solidarity is to give it, so if you've visited other workers on strike recently then invite them. You might also leaflet a big workplace like a hospital if there is one very near you, telling them that you will be striking and asking for support on the picket line. Building up links gradually with other workplaces that you have some connection with will pay off when you strike.

Visiting supporters from political organisations can be very helpful to the picket line, but a lot of pickets will have had bad experiences with this in the past and will be wary or unfriendly. It's important not to come across as the stereotypical spotty student lecturing the workers on how they are doing it wrong. The first step is simply talking to people. Don't stand to the side talking to your own friends, ask questions about the strike, ask people about what it's like to work there, most people like a chance to talk about themselves. Bringing food is usually a good icebreaker. Ask before putting up your own banner.

Strikes these days can be pretty passive, with little attempt to stop people going in except giving them a leaflet. You may feel as an outside supporter that people obviously need to up the ante and be more aggressive.

You are probably right, but this can often lead to conflict and bad feeling with the actual pickets, which

› **INVITE PEOPLE FROM OTHER WORKPLACES**

› **LEAFLET NEARBY EMPLOYERS ABOUT IT**

› **LEFTIES: THIS ISN'T ABOUT YOU AND YOUR POLITICAL MASTER PLAN**

› **TALK TO THE PICKETS, ASK ABOUT, LISTEN TO AND RESPECT THEIR WISHES**

Saltley Gate, 1972



The picket line is not just a protest, its purpose is to STOP PEOPLE GOING IN.

Nowadays a lot of strikers are uncomfortable about really doing this. The long low period we have lived through in the class struggle means that a lot of our working class culture of struggle has been lost. People find the idea that you would try to impede someone from going in a bit shocking.

Many strike breakers see the issue in terms of their individual “rights” to do exactly what they want with no regard to the effect on other workmates who may be being victimised, losing their jobs etc. There is also the issue of disciplinary action.

You may have a couple of managers standing over you watching for ‘infractions’ and also possibly the police. They may tell you that you cannot have more than six people on a picket line.

These are all attempts to make strikes ineffectual and pointless. Stand your ground as much as you can about everything, but you have to use your own judgment about the risk of disciplinaries and victimisation.

Secondary picketing, picketing a workplace not your own, is a civil not a criminal offence, and members of the public who happened to be passing by are free to stand on any picket line they like.

› TRY TO  
STOP LINE  
CROSSING

› STAND  
YOUR  
GROUND

› IT'S NOT  
ILLEGAL TO  
HAVE EXTRA  
PICKETS

The rule about no more than six people on a picket has ambiguous legal status and is worth arguing.

Whatever the level of militancy of your picket, you need to talk to people who want to go in, not just give them a leaflet. Ask them to at least stop and talk to you for a moment.

They will probably bring up their mortgage and debts, or perhaps say that the issue you are striking over is nothing to do with them. People who think it's wrong to cross the picket line but are still going to do it might be very aggressive to you, as a way of getting out of feeling guilty.

The more you can get someone to stay and talk, the better. This is a difficult conversation to have but is really important, even if the person still goes in to work. Remember that it's not just about today, it's about convincing them to join the strike next time.

› ENGAGE  
WITH PEOPLE

› THINK  
LONG-TERM

› AIM TO  
IMPROVE  
ON THE LINE  
NEXT TIME



Posties wildcat, 2011

# COLLEAGUES WHO AREN'T OUT

**You might have more than one union in your workplace and many people have been in the difficult position where one union is on strike and the other isn't.**

This isn't easy to resolve. Most of the time you can't count on any official protection if you have not been balloted, so the only thing that really counts is how much support you can get from your workmates.

The ideal situation is that nobody crosses the picket line. If you can't manage to get enough people to agree to that, there are other ways that non-striking workers can support a strike. People should try to refuse tasks that are substituting for workers who are out. In some schools during the pensions dispute, classroom assistants stood on the picket line until the last possible minute and then walked in all together.

This at least shows support and gives people time to talk and a chance to think about not going in at all, and is better than people just crossing individually.

In other schools on strike, non teaching staff have come out at lunchtime to join the picket, or workers have organised a lunchtime picnic together.

Anything that builds togetherness helps to create the possibility of people feeling able to refuse to go in at all next time.

› **AIM FOR A MASS REFUSAL TO CROSS**

› **MAKE SURE PEOPLE AREN'T COVERING FOR STRIKERS' ROLES**

› **ASK FOR SMALL SHOWS OF SUPPORT**

› **BUILD A FEELING OF SOLIDARITY**

# ORGANISING THE PICKET LINE

**A good picket line is crucial.**

The Daily Mail may rant about lazy strikers but you will need to be there some time before people usually arrive at work, as some people will come in extra early to avoid pickets. It helps if you make a strike rota which you take round before the strike asking people what time they can come to picket. Ostensibly this is to make sure you cover the time efficiently but it's also to badger people into coming to picket and turning up early.

Filling in the rota gives you a chance to talk to people and when people put their names down that is a commitment. Make sure you cover all entrances. You will need to communicate to people passing by that there is a strike on so make banners, placards, and leaflets. If you can make some yourself rather than just using union issue ones, they will look more interesting and you can communicate what you most want to say about your strike. Music and food will help make a happy collective atmosphere.

› **MAKE A ROTA**

› **GET IN EARLY**

› **MAKE SURE PEOPLE COMMIT**

› **COVER ALL ENTRANCES**

› **MAKE YOUR CAUSE CLEAR**

› **STAY UPBEAT**



Hackney, 2011